

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (currently amended)

1. A drop hammer for driving a pile comprising:
 - a housing member defining a housing chamber and a vent port arranged between the lower and upper positions, where the vent port defines a preload position, and allows ambient air to flow into and out of the housing chamber under predetermined conditions;
 - a rigid ram member supported within the housing chamber for movement relative to the housing member between an upper position and a lower position;
 - a rigid helmet member supported by the housing member for movement relative to the housing member between a rest position and an impact position;
 - a first seal arranged to seal a gap between the ram member and the housing member;
 - a second seal arranged to seal a gap between the helmet member and the housing member; and
 - a lifting assembly at least partly disposed within the housing chamber above the ram member; whereby the ram member moves from the lower position to the upper position and back to the lower position to define an operating cycle; the lifting assembly engages and lifts the ram member from the lower position to the upper position once during each operating cycle;

when the lifting system raises the ram member above the preload position, ambient air flows into the housing chamber;
the ram member free falls as the ram member moves from the upper position to the preload position;

when the ram member falls below the preload position, the first and second seals define a preload chamber, where the first and second seals seal the preload chamber such that ambient air within the preload chamber portion of the housing chamber compresses to

apply a preload force on the inner portion of the helmet member, and

oppose movement of the ram member towards the lower position such that the ram member does not free fall

when the ram member is below the preload position; and

when the ram member moves into the lower position, the ram member directly and rigidly impacts the helmet member to force the helmet member from the rest position to the impact position, thereby driving the pile.

Claims 2-3 (previously cancelled)

Claim 4 (previously presented)

4. A drop hammer as recited in claim 1, in which the first seal prevents ambient air from flowing through the vent port when the ram member is below the preload position.

Claim 5 (previously cancelled)

Claim 6 (previously presented)

6. A drop hammer as recited in claim 5, in which:
the ram member defines a ram side wall;
the housing member defines a housing interior wall;
the first seal inhibits fluid flow between the ram side wall and the
housing interior wall.

Claim 7 (previously cancelled)

Claim 8 (previously presented)

8. A drop hammer as recited in claim 5, in which:
the impact of the ram member is transmitted to the pile through the
helmet member;
the helmet member extends through a helmet opening formed in the
housing member; and
the second seal inhibits fluid flow between the helmet member and the
housing member through the helmet opening.

Claim 9 (previously presented)

9. A drop hammer as recited in claim 8, in which:
the ram member defines a ram side wall;
the housing member defines a housing interior wall;
the first seal inhibits fluid flow between the ram side wall and the
housing interior wall.

Claims 10-11 (previously cancelled)

Claim 12 (previously presented)

12. A drop hammer as recited in claim 1, further comprising a clamp assembly for securing the helmet member to the pile.

Claim 13 (currently amended)

13. A method of driving a pile comprising:
providing a housing member defining a housing chamber;
forming a vent port between the lower and upper positions, where the vent port
defines a preload position, and
allows ambient air to flow into and out of the housing chamber under predetermined conditions;
supporting a rigid helmet member from the housing member for movement relative to the housing member between a rest position and an impact position;
supporting a rigid ram member within the housing chamber for movement relative to the housing member between an upper position and a lower position;
forming a first seal between the ram member and the housing member;
forming a second seal between the helmet member and the housing member;
connecting the helmet member to the pile;
arranging at least a portion of a lifting assembly above the ram member within the housing chamber;
operating the lifting assembly to engage the ram member and raise the ram member from the lower position into the upper position to define a first portion of an operating cycle;

disengaging the lifting assembly from the ram member to allow the ram member to fall from the upper position to the lower position to define a second portion of the operating cycle;
causing the ram member directly and rigidly to impact the helmet member during the second portion of the operating cycle such that the ram member forces the helmet member from the rest position to the impact position, thereby driving the pile;
while the ram member is above a preload position, allowing ambient air to flow out of a preload chamber portion of the housing chamber defined by the housing member such that the ram member free falls as the ram member moves from the upper position to the preload position; and
while the ram member is below the preload position, the first and second seals seal a preload chamber portion of the housing chamber, thereby substantially preventing ambient air from flowing out of the preload chamber portion of the housing chamber, where ambient air within the preload chamber portion of the housing chamber compresses as the ram member moves from the preload position to the lower position to apply a preload force on the helmet member prior to impact of the ram member on the helmet member, and oppose movement of the ram member towards the lower position such that the ram member does not free fall when the ram member is below the preload position.

Claims 14-17 (previously cancelled)

Claim 18 (currently amended)

18. A drop hammer for driving a pile comprising:
a housing member defining a housing chamber and a vent port
between the lower and upper positions;
a rigid ram member supported within the housing chamber for
movement relative to the housing member between an upper
position and a lower position; and
a rigid helmet member supported by the housing member for
movement relative to the housing member between a rest
position and an impact position;
a first seal arranged to seal a gap between the ram member and the
housing member;
a second seal arranged to seal a gap between the helmet member and
the housing member; and
a lifting assembly at least partly disposed within the housing chamber
above the ram member; whereby
the ram member moves from the lower position to the upper position
and back to the lower position to define an operating cycle;
the lifting assembly engages and lifts the ram member from the lower
position to the upper position once during each operating cycle;
as the ram member falls from the upper position to a preload position
defined by the vent port, ambient air exits the housing chamber
through the vent port;
the ram member free falls as the ram member moves from the upper
position to the preload position;
when the ram member falls below the preload position, the first and
second seals seal a preload chamber portion of the housing
chamber such that ambient air within the preload chamber

portion of the housing chamber below the vent port compresses as the ram member moves into the lower position to apply a preload force on the helmet member, and oppose movement of the ram member towards the lower position such that the ram member does not free fall when the ram member is below the preload position; and when the ram member moves into the lower position, the ram member directly and rigidly impacts the helmet member to drive the pile.

Claims 19-20 (previously cancelled)

Claim 21 (original)

21. A drop hammer as recited in claim 18, further comprising a clamp assembly for securing the helmet member to the pile.